



Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

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WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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July 18 deadline coming up

Owners of small farms and ranches could miss out on agriculture census opportunity

OLYMPIA – July 18 is the deadline for farmers and ranchers to submit their 2002 census of agriculture forms, and the state Department of Agriculture said today that about 10 percent of the state's agricultural producers might miss their opportunity to be counted. Most people who don't respond to the census are owners of small, part time, or specialty farms that may not consider themselves true farmers.

"Ironically, these are the same people who often benefit from federal grants and projects set-up to sustain and promote diverse specialty crops and small family farms," says Ray Garibay state statistician at the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service in Olympia. The census occurs only once every five years and is important to Washington because federal and state agencies use census data to design and fund local projects, promote the sale of U.S. products in foreign markets, and determine crop insurance premiums and payments.

Washington has one of the most diverse agricultural industries in the nation, with more than 300 commodities. With a 90 percent response rate to date, Washington is above the national average of 85 percent. The state ranks fifth, behind Rhode Island, Arkansas, Wyoming and Alaska.

"Our goal is to hear from everyone who received a census form, even if they are no longer farming," says Garibay. "The census is the only source of consistent, comparable data at the county, state and national levels. If we don't hear from them, we can't be certain of their farm status."

Pend Oreille and Columbia counties have the highest return rates with 94 percent each. Counties with return rates below the state's average are Grays Harbor, Mason, Snohomish, King, Klickitat, Franklin and Stevens.

Census data are also used to:

- Examine long-term trends and anticipate the future direction of agriculture.
- Allocate local and national funds for farm programs.
- Help agribusiness develop sales territories and marketing plans for fertilizer, seed, processing, storage, transportation and equipment.
- Help state and federal agencies evaluate the effects of changes in farm legislation.
- Assess patterns in water use and irrigation to determine resource and management needs.
- Allocate cooperative extension funding, services and research at the local level.

For help completing the census, visit USDA's Web site at www.nass.usda.gov/census/ or call (888) 4AG-STAT.

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